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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001299

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AF/S FOR S. HILL
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN
USAID FOR M. COPSON AND E. LOKEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: CHURCH LEADERS "NATIONAL VISION" REJECTED BY
OPPOSITION

REF: HARARE 00783

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

11. (C) Summary. A group of religious leaders presented President Mugabe October 27 with a so-called "national vision" document they said is intended as a road map for dialogue leading to a resolution of Zimbabwe's problems. While stating that the document could lead to consensus among Zimbabweans on a way forward, Mugabe ruled out constitutional reform, a primary tenet of the church leaders proposal. Government-controlled media heralded the document, but it received a chilly reception from the opposition. Leaders of the Christian Alliance, an umbrella group of Christian groups opposed to Mugabe attended the ceremony and supported the concept but branded the process "a joke" that had allowed Mugabe too much control over the final wording. For its part, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) told us that Mugabe's embracing of the document while simultaneously rejecting its call for constitutional change showed his lack of sincerity and his intent to "buy time." End Summary.

"The Zimbabwe we want"

12. (U) Church leaders from the Catholic Bishops Conference, Zimbabwe Council of Churches, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe presented President Mugabe, at a public ceremony on October 27, with a 43-page document, "The Zimbabwe We Want*Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe." It assesses the current situation in Zimbabwe, including the divisive political atmosphere, contentious laws, the failed economic framework, corruption, dysfunctional land redistribution, and international isolation. The document calls for dialogue

leading to national reconciliation and outlines specific steps to resolve Zimbabwe's political, economic, and social problems.

13. (U) Importantly, the document notes that Zimbabweans accepted the Lancaster House Constitution as an interim measure and that many Zimbabweans desire a new and "home grown" constitution that enshrines human and national values with constitutional protections. The document also highlights the chaos of land redistribution, a resulting culture of racial hatred, and the importance of a fair resolution of the land issue, including compensation. and specifically and the need for a "home grown" and fair constitution.

Mugabe and his take

14. (C) The launch was the culmination of months of drafting that began after Mugabe met with the church leaders last spring. (Ref) The government-controlled media gave front-page attention to the launch and has subsequently pulled out all the stops in publicizing the report. It has portrayed the document as an important step forward, and highlighted Mugabe's remarks. In his lengthy speech accepting the document, Mugabe commended the initiative of the Church in undertaking the initiative, referred to the document as a "road map" to reconciliation, and stressed the need to set aside political differences. However, with regard to the constitution, Mugabe said he strongly disagreed with the need for a new "home grown" constitution. Mugabe concluded that

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the GOZ would entertain amendments to the existing constitution but never accept the need for a new one. (Comment: Mugabe's rejection of constitutional reform needs to be seen in the light of his support for a new constitution in 2000. The difference, obviously, is that the 2000 constitution, rejected by voters, would have expanded his powers and term. End Comment.)

15. (C) According to Embassy FSN's who attended the event, Mugabe's remarks rambled and he occasionally lost his train of thought. He elicited little applause in contrast to the response to church leaders who also spoke. Physically, Mugabe appeared to have lost weight and hair, and appeared frail. In shaking hands with attendees after his speech, his face showed little emotion. (Note: At a farewell for the Austrian ambassador, captured by state television a couple of days earlier, Mugabe also appeared extremely frail. End Note.)

Split within the Church

16. (C) In extolling the document as a basis for national dialogue, evangelical Bishop Trevor Manhanga, one of its authors, told polchief that it had been written in consultation with a cross-section of the political community. Moreover, Manhanga portrayed himself and fellow church leaders responsible for the document as representing the views of the "mainstream" churches in Zimbabwe and dismissed criticism from the Christian Alliance, an umbrella church group that he said had "no constituency."

17. (C) In contrast, Bishop L.T.C. Kadenge, a member of the Christian Alliance, told polchief that his organization was the true representative of the dispossessed not Mahanga and his fellow authors, who had shown themselves to be supporters of the regime. Kadenge said that by allowing Mugabe to preview the document, the religious leaders had allowed Mugabe to eviscerate the final draft, turning the process into a "joke." For example, Kadenge said an earlier draft had called for a new constitution by 2007. This

recommendation is not contained in the final document. Kadenge said that although representatives of the Christian Alliance had attended the launch of the document, they would now find it difficult to participate in a dialogue with the GOZ given Mugabe's position on a new constitution.

MDC reaction

¶8. (C) MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa told polchief that Manhanga had solicited MDC input but that the MDC had never been consulted on the final document. While the MDC, which did not attend the October 27 ceremony, will not take a formal position until its executive committee meets this weekend, Chamisa stated that the central issue of the document is its call for consideration of a new constitution. Chamisa said that by rejecting ab initio a new constitution, Mugabe has demonstrated his "lack of sincerity." Chamisa added Mugabe is trying to manipulate church leaders, neutralize the opposition and buy time.

Comment

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¶9. (S/NF) According to sensitive reporting, Manhanga presented an initial draft of the document to Mugabe and consulted on the final draft with CIO Director General Happyton Bonyongwe and Minister for State Security Didymus Mutasa, who made substantial changes to it. No doubt Mugabe saw an opportunity to create yet another diversion from seriously addressing the real issues, while also staving off pressure from the churches. The perception that the clerics were co-opted or tricked by Mugabe and the regime is already widespread, and if the details of the actual negotiations emerge, both the document and the church leaders will be highly discredited in the eyes of all but Mugabe's loyalists. Indeed, the huge publicity given to the report by the state media has already raised eyebrows and cast doubts over the endeavor.

¶10. (C) Manhanga is a regular embassy contact and a well-respected religious leader. By all accounts his involvement in this initiative is well-intentioned. However, by closely allying themselves with Mugabe in writing and presenting the document Manhanga and his fellow church leaders probably fatally compromised their initiative even before Mugabe's immediate rejection of the need for a new constitution.
DELL